NEW PUBLICATIONS.

AN OLD NOVEL.

RANTHORPE. By GEORGE HENRY LEWES. 12mo. New-York. William S. Gottsberger. 1881.

The history of this little book is somewhat curious. It was written in the year 1842 and was published in the year 1847. Whether it was republished then in this country we do not know: but to most of our readers we suspect that it will be a novelty, and enhance the recent and special interest in the career of the distinguished author. Mr. Lewes, in the preface to the edition of 1847, furnishes some information respecting the work. It was presented to the public in one volume—it was originally written in three; and it is suggested that it has not been altogether benefited by "so great a change in the structure and proportions of the whole." "Of these faults," says Mr. Lewes, "I became aware only when too late—when reading the proof sheets; and all that now remains is to confess and apologize." Mr. Lewes was born in 1817, and when he published this novel was only thirty years old. This may account for much of its crudeness, and for a certain literary foppery too plainly observable; and yet it was also in 1847 that he published his "Biographical History of Philosophy, from Thales to Comte." Noticeably "Ranthorpe" is dedicated as follows: "To Her who has Lightened the Burden of an Anxious Life, this Work is Inscribed by Her Husband." This wife thus tenderly addressed must have been the woman whose subsequent misconduct, once heroically condoned, brought so much tragedy into the life of Mr. Lewes, and whose desertion of her home opened a place for Marian Evans. "Ranthorpe," we are inclined to believe, must be slightly autobiographical, picturing as it does the early difficulties of a young writer in securing pubic recognition, athough very soon after his return from his studies in Germany in 1839 Mr. Lewes was in demand as a writer for the literary newspapers and leading quarterly reviews. Another novel by Mr. Lewes, entitled, "Rose, Blanche and Violet," was published in 1848.

Percy Ranthorpe was the son of a disagreeable old gentleman who has been ruined by commercial ill-luck, and who has a great contempt for the cultivators of literature. Articled to a lawyer, and with an exceeding dislike for the profession selected for him, Ranthorpe reads, writes, studies and indulges in ambitious dreams. Here is a pretty sketch of him before an old book stall:

> His eyes wandered over the titles of the volumes so temptingly displayed; but nothing came within reach of his finances. His was a Barmecide feast; he cared not for rare editions, large paper copies, or sumptuous bindings. His hunger was for knowledge; he had a passion for books—no matter what editions, what bindings; he cared not even whether they had covers at all. He only thought of the price.
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> After enviously opening many a volume, with a secret consciousness that his looking at the price was all a magnificent juggle with himself, as he was certain not to be able to pay it, yet still pleased with even an imaginary purchase, he at last came to a tub filled with dirty ancient books. From this tub rose a stick, bearing a piece of card-board, on which was written:
>
> ALL THESE BOOKS 6d. THE VOL.

Returning home delighted with his acquisition of a volume of "Shelley's Poems," he encounters his prosaic father, when the following scene ensues:

> "What, *more* books!" reproachfully exclaimed his father, as he entered the room. "What can he do with them all, I can't think." This was said to a young girl who was at that moment preparing Percy's supper.
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> Percy was silent. He had been so long accustomed to the sneers and reproaches of his father on the point, that though he had not ceased to feel them, he had quite ceased defending himself.
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> "I suppose," continued Mr. Ranthorpe, "you have gone without dinner again to-day to buy that trash."
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> "I dined frugally, and bought this book with the money saved."
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> "Well, if you like to starve yourself, for the sake of the books, that's your affair, not mine," rejoined Mr. Ranthorpe. With this observation—his unfailing one—he let the matter drop.

In Ranthorpe's squalid home resides Isola Churchill, a beautiful orphan, daughter of a former partner of Mr. Ranthorpe, and adopted by him. She encouraged the young man in his literary aspirations, and, of course, he is very fond of her. He has written a volume entitled "Poems of the Affections"; his efforts to secure a publisher are amusingly told, and let the reader into many secrets of the trade. As the booksellers will have nothing to do with the "Poems of the Affections," Ranthorpe of course is in despair, and exclaims: "I shall die unknown, Isola! I shall die unrecorded and unread. Oh! if the poems *could* but appear, they would be sure to succeed; I know it; feel it. But these ignorant booksellers, thinking only of pounds, shillings and pence, know nothing of poetry and care nothing about it." To this Isola answers with exceeding good sense: "But, darling, you must not blame them; pounds, shillings and pence are their objects; they are tradesmen, not critics." The poems are sent to "Blackwood," who will have nothing to do with them, and then to "Fraser," with the same dire result. At last one magazine actually prints "The Poet's Heart—by Percy Ranthorpe," to the author's infinite pride and delight. This fixes his literary destiny as a like appearance has fixed that of so many others for good or for evil. Ranthorpe determines to abandon his law apprenticeship to the intense disgust of his prosaic father, who strikes him and orders him out of the house. The young man having "only money enough left for three weeks' penurious existence" becomes naturally a journalist and is supremely happy when he is made a dramatic critic:

> Passionately fond of the drama he undertook the task of criticism as a luxury. He scarcely ever missed an evening's performance. Beyond this conceive the pride of "being on the press!" His pen was a power: at least he thought so. The printing-office, dirty, murky and ill-ventilated, was a sacred spot to him. He rejoiced in its gaseous heated atmosphere; he loved the smell of the ink and damp paper. In a word, all the disagreeable things connected with his office were converted into pleasures by the fact of their relation to the great profession of literature: they were *les coulisses* of the great theatre on which he hoped to play so illustrious a part.
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> Every Sunday morning the paper lay upon his breakfast-table, and made him feel that he was "somebody," as he cut the leaves and eagerly read over his own contributions.

Old Ranthorpe dies, after extorting from his son a promise to abandon the pursuits of literature, which he seems to regard as criminal, and destined to bring its votaries to the scaffold. The beautiful Isola becomes a governess. Young Ranthorpe gives up journalism, publishes a volume of new poems, and is suddenly a literary lion, his "Dream of Youth" being a great success. We are at once reminded of the antiquity of this book and of the retrospective character of this review, when we encounter our hero at a ball given by the Lady Theresa, bending over the pianoforte and talking with "the lovely young Giulia Grisi," who was "superbly handsome at that period, like a Greek statue in the mould of her head and bust." Ranthorpe is now dressed in the newest fashion," and as Mr. Lewes remarks, "is quite a picture. He was not only the supreme poet of the albums, but the first waltzer in London." There is a good deal of stuff about "his aristocratic air, his haughty bearing, his beauty and his success," which disagreeably reminds us of Lord Beaconsfield at his worst, yet Mr. Lewes is too strong a man not speedily to recover himself, as he does in the following passage on "Lionism," which is really prosaic enough to have been written by Harriet Martineau:

> Wretched youth! He had lost an author's courage to endure poverty and neglect, to live unnoticed, unflattered, unappreciated; because he had lost that conception of his mission which makes martyrdom a glory. Poverty, then, for the first time appeared in all its terrors. It was not only poverty to him—it was failure. He had lived upon eightpence a day, and had been rich upon it. He now lived as a prodigal, and dreaded the inevitable termination of his career. In the society he now frequented he believed personal influence the great requisite for success; and that his "powerful friends" would remove all the barriers that kept him from fortune and renown. He was daily getting more of these friends; fresh houses were constantly being opened to him; his position in society was daily becoming more prominent. But all his little fortune was squandered, and debts were fast increasing. At first the expenses inevitable upon his position wrung from him secret cries of anguish, and his delight at being invited to some country-seat was considerably alloyed by the idea of what it would cost him. He soon got over this; and the life of a man about town suited his disposition so well that he insensibly fell into it, and squandered his money with a poet's recklessness.

Literature, of course, does not get on well amidst all this dissipation, while Isola is forgotten. Ranthorpe's love for her is not strong enough to save him. He abjures his mission to maintain a wretched place in society. He has a long discussion with Isola, the inevitable result of which is that he is "to consider her as a sister." He has become "an idle, intoxicated, feverish Lion." His "Lyrics" follow his "Dreams of Youth." "Exquisite imaginings," says a morning paper of them; "a volume of lofty ideality," says an evening paper. But all the critics are not so gentle. Some of them are severe; others outrageous; and "the volume is received with universal condemnation." Ranthorpe is "shorn of his glorious mane; he goes into society, and finds himself no longer a lion." He has to learn several wholesome things:

> He had to learn, not only the impotence of a coterie, but the serious truth that literature is not a field to sport in; that there, insolence and audacity are quickly crushed; and that a man is not, there, accepted for what he holds himself. He had to learn that puffery or luck, though it may give a momentary success, cannot sustain it: real ability alone does that. Sooner or later, the puffed-out wind-bag, floating so buoyantly aloft, is pricked by a pin, and then tumbles into the mire, never to rise again. A first success is the *premier pas;* but in literature it is not the *premier pas qui coute.*

More than all, he is in love with the fascinating Florence Wilmington. She is a flirt and "he had drunk deeply of the poisoned goblet, which her lily hand held up to him," quite forgetting Isola, who has become a governess in the same house with Florence, and falls senseless and broken-hearted upon overhearing Ranthorpe declare his love for Miss Wilmington, with whom, of course, after such a coincidence, he has no chance. His way is becoming darker and darker. Isola disappears, and he is left in a truly pitiable situation, as he deserves to be. Duns beset him; a prison stares him in the face; and in his rage he curses the world and its falsehoods. After a time, and through certain influences, he sets vigorously to work again; his mind recovers its elasticity; he writes a play; he leaves it at the theatre; after long neglect the manager sends for him; and the following conversation, which will be interesting to dramatic neophytes, ensues:

> "Well, Mr. Ranthorpe," said the manager, as he seated himself, "I have read your tragedy with attention—very great attention—and I can truly say, that I was charmed with it—quite charmed. It is quite a treat to me to see such a play, I assure you. Fanciful dialogue—*ideal* dialogue—" and he looked at him to mark what effect this flattery might have.
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> "Ideal dialogue," he continued, "powerful language, and all that sort of thing—but rather too long."
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> "Too long?"
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> "Rather—for the stage. But that can be easily altered; and the parts quite suit our company."
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> "I shall be happy to shorten it."
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> "There will be a great many trifling alterations necessary—mere trifles—but very important trifles on the stage. Some of your situations, for example, are *impracticable.*" Here he detailed some.
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> "Impracticable!" exclaimed the astonished poet, "why they have never been tried—they are original!"
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> "Yes: perhaps so,' resumed the manager with complacency, "but original situations are always dangerous. Keep to what has been tried, and proved successful—it will prove so again: that is my maxim!'
>
> "But unless certain things are tried you will never know whether they succeed or not."
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> "They would have most probably been tried before now, if thought well of. Our house is too expensive to be a school for experiments; we cannot afford to fail. I always wait till some other house has risked a novelty; if it fails, I rejoice at my escape; if it succeeds, I imitate it, and work it till the public declares 'hold, enough.'"

Ranthorpe, after contesting the matter stoutly, is forced to succumb, and to apply the pruning knife to his tragedy. The chapter on the rehearsals is very life-like and amusing. For instance:

> There was another who could not be made to deliver correctly this passage, to be said in agitation:
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> Fulvia is my sister—true!
> But why am I—her brother—to be mixed
> In all her headstrong plans?
>
> This he delivered as,
>
> Fulvia is my sister—true!
> But why am I her brother?—to be mixed
> In all her headstrong plans?
>
> "I beg your pardon," observed the author, biting his lips; "but you have mistaken my meaning in that passage. 'But why am I?' a slight pause after 'I,' if you please, to denote the flurry of his thoughts, and then resume 'her brother'—then another slight pause."
>
> "Oh, I know what you mean:
>
> Fulvia is my sister—true!
> But why I am I her brother?—"
>
> "No, no," shouted Ranthorpe; but his anger was inaudible in the laughter with which this reading was received.

The tragedy being performed, is duly damned. Ranthorpe at first contemplates suicide, but is led into a more rational mood by one Thornton, an eccentric old gentleman. Then Isola sends Ranthorpe a letter full of consolation, sympathy and good advice; but still conceals the place of her retreat. He advertises for her in *The Times* in vain. Meanwhile, the plot thickens and becomes tragical. Mr. Thornton has a scapegrace of a nephew called Oliver, who resolves to murder his uncle for the sake of his money. He accomplishes this nefarious transaction and escapes, but Ranthorpe is suspected of the crime, and circumstantial testimony being strong against him, he is locked up for trial. In due time he is released, and Oliver executed. All this part of the novel seems really to have little to do with it, though it may have been less out of place when the novel was in its three-volume state. The following, however, is droll:

> One incident I cannot omit, it is so illustrative of theatrical life. A fortnight after his acquittal, the manager of a minor theatre, which shall be nameless, called upon him, and with inimitable effrontery proposed that Ranthorpe should sustain his *own* character in a new piece about to be produced, entitled, "The Dark Deed; or the Knightsbridge Murder."
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> "If you will undertake this slight part," continued the manager, "I can offer you a splendid salary—fifty pounds a week, sir; fifty pounds a week!"
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> Ranthorpe was half irritated, half amused, but shook his head negatively.
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> "Don't refuse it, pray, sir; consider fifty pounds a week—come, I don't mind if I say seventy pounds—and absolutely nothing to do but to rush into the room—give a start—look aghast—and shriek, '*Ha!*' and to reappear as the accused murderer, with your dress a little disarranged—that's all, sir."
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> "I fear," replied Ranthorpe, smiling, "that all would be far too much for me. I must decline being any further mixed up with this matter."
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> "Timid, I suppose; but you'll soon shake off that."
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> "No, sir, I shall never shake off my disgust at the infamous desecration of the privacies of life, which that system of dramatizing recent events fosters. It is bad enough to see the newspapers pander to the vile appetites of the blood-loving public. The stage has not the excuse of the papers."
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> He rose as he said this, and the manager was forced to take his leave. He returned, however, speedily, and said: "Mr. Ranthorpe, I appreciate your motives; you don't like to appear before the lamps. But you can still assist me; and I will pay for the assistance. Sell me the razor with which the murder was committed—I'll give fifty pounds for it. All London will flock to my theatre to see the *real* razor! Think what posters I could give! *Every Night—'*THE DARK DEED.*' In which the* REAL *razor used by the murderer will be introduced. Come early.*"

Avoiding other episodes, we return to Ranthorpe. He studies two years in Berlin, and returns with another tragedy in his portfolio; "an extraordinary work which startles the public into enthusiasm." Isola and Ranthorpe are of course brought together again, but not until she has become engaged to somebody else who magnanimously yields her, out of pure friendship. The happiness of Percy and Isola was now complete; but instead of a good deal which is of the modern novel novelish, we give the following which shows Mr. Lewes's early inclination to philosophize:

> The love of a boy differs from that of a man in this—it is the wanton enjoyment of a present imperious feeling, from which all serious consideration of the future is excluded. It is a mere blind activity of newly-awakened emotions. Hence the rashness of early loves. The boy wants to love; almost any woman will suffice. Hence he is violent, capricious, inconstant, because he only seeks an excitement; he tries his young wings. The tender feeling of *protection*, which enters so largely into the love of a man,—the serious thoughts of the duties he owes to the girl who gives up her life to him, and to the children she may bear him,—these, and the thousand minute but powerful influences which affect the man, are unknown to the boy.
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> Percy Ranthorpe felt that he was entering upon the most important epoch of his life. Already had many things become clearer to him. He could say, with Shelley:
>
> In no communion with this purest being
> Kindled intenser zeal, and made me wise
> In knowledge which, in hers my own mind seeing,
> Left in the human world few mysteries."

No doubt "Ranthorpe" will be read with pleasure and interest by the admirers of Mr. Lewes. But they must be prepared for a good deal of literary crudity, and for some errors of taste and good judgment. The book is a curiosity, but it is not much more.

THE AUTHOR OF "THORNDALE."

A. Strahan in The Day of Rest.

I owed my first personal acquaintance with William Smith to an introduction by the accomplished lady whom he had the singular good fortune to make his wife. Not a few will remember the name of Miss Cumming, the able translator of Freytag's "Debit and Credit," and of the "Life of Frederic Perthes," who may not have learned that she became the wife of the author of "Thorndale." In Edinburgh circles it was understood that he and she had met at the English Lakes, while Miss Cumming was staying there with an invalid mother, and as it had long been well known in the northern capital that William Smith was an old and frequent contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*, as well as being the author of the remarkable volume he had published, everybody was willing to learn from the lady all that could be gathered as to one who was said to be as shy and recluse as he was able. I have since heard friends confess that they were very dull at the time not to gather the true significance of some embarrassment that was at times shown in the answering of their questions.

One forenoon Mrs. Smith called at my office. As I went forward to meet her I noticed, a step or two behind her, a slightly-built gentleman, somewhat below the middle height, and no longer young, though at the same time not showing age much. He had stopped in following Mrs. Smith, and was, in fact, looking disturbed, and as if, on the whole, he would rather be on the other side of the door. I scarcely needed telling that I at length saw the author of "Thorndale." The shyness which he showed was shyness of a very peculiar kind. After the first minute it did not pain an observer to witness it. Hardly could it be said that as you talked on it passed away; it in some degree stayed, but you came not to take it into account. A smile of perfect graciousness began to flit over his face, and the bright dark eyes met yours fully, in no way shrinking from looking into your mind, and quite ready to be looked into. But for the eyes, the face scarcely could be called impressive, though it grew more and more interesting as you gazed. The forehead was not high, but was well-formed. I afterward found that he might fairly be described as a brilliant talker, when he was once roused. At this earliest meeting, however, in spite of some unconcealed encouragement from Mrs. Smith, the remarks he made were very brief, though always prompt and given with a smile. The shyness, meanwhile, went a little, came back again, and afresh faded, but toward the the close of the talk it was reinstated in nearly full force on my venturing to allude to his writings. I found that the diffidence could become an actual embarrassment if any one did not restrain the natural impulse to offer words of praise. But the instant the conversation turned away from himself, Mr. Smith's mind quieted again. Taken altogether, there was, as I now try to recall that first interview, something nearly boyish in Mr. Smith's bearing—a touch of old-fashionedness, as though he had strayed for a minute into this world out of another; but it was another world which, if not so bustling as this, was kinder, and in which everybody was very sincere.

Many people, who had not thought out its likelihood beforehand, would have been surprised to find that an acute ethical thinker and recondite metaphysician could be so merry in a large part of his talk. True, it alternated. In the midst of the light wit some very serious reflection would from time to time peep out; even though, in the fashion of its utterer, it hurried to hide itself again. The general impression produced upon you was that you were in the society of a perfectly original man; one who valued at very little most of the honors and the possessions prized by people in general, but who had deliberately stepped aside from the ordinary ambitions, to give himself up to thinking everything out for himself and living in his own self-prompted way, undisturbed.

I think that I should have got this notion even if I had not known what I by this time did of Mr. Smith's career. Something of it, I believe, anyone spending time in his company would have soon guessed, even if they had not been told that after he had been educated for the law he had calmly turned his back upon it, and for years buried himself in cottage lodgings to devote himself wholly to the business of a solitary thinker. Everything had been made to give way to the pursuing of deep reasoning; not only had he declined to follow up the chance of being Professor Wilson's successor in a chair of Moral Philosophy, but even literature itself had been made to yield and sacrifice her prospects. William Smith, as I then was aware, became a contributor to *The Quarterly Review* when he was only twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age; and he had really much versatility of literary faculty—being poet, tale-writer, and reviewer, as well as philosophical author. Further, I had learned from his talk, though by inference as much as from direct statement, that he reckoned among his earliest friends men who had much influence in the world of letters—for example, John Sterling's father (the "Thunderer" of *The Times*), Mr. Lockhart, J. S. Mill, Mr. G. H. Lewes. Work must have been open to him in plenty, with friendly encouragement to help him on; but although he was very industrious in his own way, he must work at just such rate as his thinking itself prompted. He would not even push literature as a profession in the same way that other men did. He must always be at liberty to think—to go to the bottom of a subject and become my aphysical.

William Smith, as all who ever saw his manuscript when meant for the printers knew, could write with admirable distinctness, but in making hasty private jottings, the hand tried to keep pace with the swift brain. Mrs. Smith stated that many of what she believed to be his most happy inspirations, his acutest reflections, his most suggestive turns of phrase, had in this way been irrecoverably lost. He was, she added, always promising that he would cure this habit, but it was ever recurring. He simply said, with a humorous grimace, 'Well, I must think that point out again.' It appeared to be so easy for him to amass ideas by giving a little labor to the task, that the loss of one or two of them did not, after all, very much signify.

I, though not without a little trouble, got him to accept an invitation to spend an evening with me at my home in Bayswater, to meet some friends of my own. These included, among others, Dr. Norman Macleod, who had expressed to me a strong wish to make the acquaintance of William Smith. It was curious, and I may perhaps be allowed to say a little amusing, to note the author of "Thorndale's" shy demeanor among the group of admirers he found himself surrounded by. There was, I should say, not one present who did not feel intellectually indebted to him, and it was not very unnatural that they should wish to acknowledge this to him and to offer him their thanks. But a compliment always alarmed William Smith. I saw him, in a flutter of mental distress, turn his looks away from first one and then another, who had only inflicted on him the injury of offering him praise. I went to his help, and tried to protect him against this paying of compliments, which most men would have given much to receive.

As I now think of him, William Smith stands out a very distinct figure in the circle of that evening. There were men there well known in literature, some more conspicuously public than he; but none of the others so differed from each other as he did from them all. I should suppose that, so far as mere money rewards went, he had been the least successful of that group of writers. But every one of them showed him a kind of deference. I fancy they all felt that this slight dark-eyed man, who was as diffident as he was able, and to whom neither achievement nor age brought self-confidence, had made more personal sacrifices for letters than any other there, and in a certain sense had done their common vocation most honor, by pursuing literature more completely for her own sake. Dr. Macleod, after some talk with him, took occasion to whisper to me, "Smith has more brains than all the lot of us, and a heart as pure as a woman's. I wish I could meet the man every day."